UNITED NATIONS

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United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
Rio de Janeiro
3-14 June 1992

Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.151/12
13 May 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

ADOPTION OF AGREEMENTS ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Note verbale dated 5 May 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

The Permanent Representative of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and has the honour to inform the Secretary-General that at the Conference of Ministers of Environment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC countries) held in New Delhi on 8 and 9 April 1992, it was decided to request the Secretary-General of the Conference to circulate the Joint Communiqué issued by the Ministers as an official document of the Conference in Rio de Janeiro.

The Secretary-General of SAARC has requested the Government of Sri Lanka, in its capacity as Chairman of SAARC, to take action accordingly.

In view of the above, it will be appreciated if action is taken to circulate the attached Joint Communiqué as an official document of the Conference.

* A/CONF.151/1.

ANNEX

Joint Communiqué of the SAARC Environment Ministers Conference, held at New Delhi on 8 and 9 April 1992

1. In pursuance of the Declaration made by the Heads of States/Governments during the Sixth SAARC Summit in December 1991, the Ministers of Environment of the countries of the SAARC region, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, met at New Delhi, India, on 8 and 9 April 1992 at a Ministerial Conference to deliberate upon the issues related to the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

2. The Ministers noted that the SAARC region is one of the more economically backward in the world and though the seven member States account for 20 per cent of the world's population living on 11 per cent of the world's land area, they generate only 2 per cent of the world's GNP. The daily survival needs of the majority of the people are met mainly through direct dependence on the natural resources of the region. The predominant economic activity is agriculture, still largely based on traditional practices and weather patterns. International trade in the region is dominated by the export of agricultural products and raw materials, while many industrial and consumer goods have to be imported since industrialization is at a low level. Illiteracy and poverty are widespread, health care and housing are inadequate and a sizeable part of the population is chronically under-nourished.

3. The Ministers further noted that despite these problems, the SAARC region has a history and tradition of conservation, environment-friendly lifestyles, great respect for plants, animals and other manifestations of nature, as well as an attitude of living in harmony with them. Waste minimization, including the maximum possible reuse and recycling as also frugality of needs, are all inherent in the way of life in this region.

4. The Ministers agreed that among the widespread problems of the SAARC region are the pressures on forests from internal and external factors, degradation of natural ecosystems, severe soil loss created by the compulsions of marginal agriculture, desertification, salinity and waterlogging, floods and other natural disasters, increasing urban and industrial pollution in some areas, gross inadequacy of housing, sanitation and access to potable water, widespread disease and undernutrition, demographic pressures and unemployment and insufficient public awareness of environmental problems. The Ministers further agreed that environmental protection in the SAARC region must be viewed as an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it. Therefore, the pace of economic development must be stepped up appreciably with agricultural modernization, industrialization and rapid development of infrastructure. Financial and technological support from the developed countries is necessary for these activities to be carried out in an environment-friendly manner.

5. The Ministers noted that each SAARC nation attempts to address these problems through rural development, industrialization, population planning, health care, sanitation and housing, pollution control, scientific forest management and afforestation, improved agriculture and management of water resources, flood control, and the incorporation of environmental concerns into national planning, in policy formulation and in implementation of development projects. Necessary policies, legislation and institutional structures have been developed in some of the SAARC countries. Some have developed national conservation strategies, while others are working on such strategies.

6. The Ministers pointed out that with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the developed countries have overexploited the world's natural resources through unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, in the process damaging the global environment, specially to the detriment of the developing countries. The Ministers noted with concern that the SAARC region faces grave threats from disturbances in the global environment caused by the industrialized world. Developing countries would be innocent victims of phenomena such as climate change, which may lead to drastic impacts, including a rise in sealevel and disruption in the monsoon pattern. About 250 million people in the SAARC region alone are dependent on coastal resources, directly or indirectly, and their livelihood is physically threatened. The impacts would be particularly severe on the small island nations, as well as on the region as a whole. Protection of the global environment is in the interest of all humankind but the developed countries, in view of their main responsibility for global environmental degradation and their significantly greater financial and technological resources, must bear the main burden of global environmental protection and restoration measures.

Principles for the Conference

7. The Ministers agreed that the Conference, and the international action to follow the Conference, should be based on the following basic principles:

(a) Environmental protection cannot be isolated from the general issues of development and must be viewed as an integral part of development efforts. A global partnership should be forged which simultaneously seeks to protect the environment while addressing the development needs of the developing countries.

(b) It is essential that widespread poverty in developing countries should be tackled head-on so as to break the vicious circle involving poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation.

(c) Developing countries are presently faced by a situation where protectionism is growing, the debt burden is increasing, terms of trade continue to deteriorate and reverse financial resource flows are taking place. It is essential that a supportive international economic climate be created, conducive to sustained economic growth and development, particularly in developing countries.

(d) Each country has sovereign rights over the natural resources falling within its national jurisdiction.

(e) Decisions regarding development strategies for sustainable development are a matter of national decision-making. The role of international cooperation should be to support and supplement, and not supplant, national efforts.

(f) The integration of environmental concerns into policies and programmes concerning economic development should be carried out without introducing any conditionality in aid or development financing. It should also not be used as a pretext for erecting trade barriers.

(g) Efforts must be made to rectify the present imbalance created by the developed countries that continue to use a huge and disproportionate share of the finite resources of the earth and to undertake measures for providing an equitable share of its carrying capacity to the developing countries, enabling them to reach adequate levels of development.

(h) The omission of pollutants, including the discharge of hazardous and toxic wastes, is occurring predominantly in the developed countries and these countries have, therefore, the prime responsibility for taking corrective action.

Financial resources

8. The Ministers noted with deep concern the lack of progress in the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee on the provision of new and additional financial resources. The Ministers emphasized the need for the provision of adequate, new and additional funds to the developing countries to enable them to participate effectively in the implementation and follow-up of the entire Agenda 21. They stressed that such funding should be provided in addition and apart from the ODA target commitments by the developed countries. Furthermore, a distinct and specific funding mechanism should be established for the implementation of Agenda 21. Developed countries should make assessed contributions to ensure predictability in the flow of financial resources to such a fund. The governance of the fund should be transparent and democratic in nature, providing an equal voice to all parties. Furthermore, there should be distinct funding mechanisms for the international conventions on climate change and biodiversity presently under negotiation.

Technology transfer

9. The Ministers emphasized the need for the transfer of technology on preferential, non-commercial and concessional terms to the developing countries. They stressed that the concept of technology transfer should not be diluted by referring to it as technology cooperation. The developing countries are not in a position to bear the burden of acquiring new environmentally sound technologies. Easy and full access to such technologies is necessary to enable the developing countries to participate effectively in

combating environmental degradation. It is necessary, therefore, that a mechanism is set up for transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries on preferential and non-commercial terms.

Biodiversity

10. The SAARC region is rich in biodiversity and has borne considerable cost in the conservation of these resources over the ages. These efforts must be recognized and supported by the international community. The international convention on biodiversity, currently being negotiated, must clearly establish the linkage between access to genetic resources and the transfer of biotechnology which uses such resources, research and development efforts in the country of origin and sharing of the results of scientific research and of commercial profits. Issues of intellectual property rights must be satisfactorily resolved so that they do not obstruct the transfer of technology, including biotechnology.

Climate change

11. The Ministers expressed serious concern about the growing evidence of the increase in greenhouse gas levels leading to the possibility of climate change with consequential impact on the global environment. They reiterated the fact that the developed countries are responsible for excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, historically and currently, and must take immediate action to stabilize and reduce such emissions. Developing countries should not be expected to undertake such measures in the near future; they can be encouraged through technological and financial resources to take appropriate action within national plans, priorities and programmes, without compromising on the need to pursue development and to meet energy requirements. The problem of climate change will require the development of viable energy resources, including renewable resources, as also sustainable agricultural practices. Developing countries will also require full scientific, technical and financial resources to cope with the adverse impact of climate change. The proposed convention on climate change must tackle all these issues apart from those of transfer of technology and financial resources. Global warming and its consequential effects pose a serious threat to countries of South Asia and other similarly affected countries and it is imperative that developed countries adopt urgent and effective measures to control and arrest this trend. The responsibilities of developed countries also extend to providing technological and financial support to those developing countries that suffer the consequences of sealevel rise.

Forests

12. The Ministers noted with some satisfaction that the SAARC countries have made significant efforts towards preventing deforestation and carrying out afforestation on a large scale. These efforts can be enhanced if greater financial and technological resources are made available on a multilateral or bilateral basis, without prejudice to the principle of national sovereignty over natural resources. The Ministers agreed that efforts to negotiate

international agreements and regulations in this regard are not acceptable and cannot be supported.

Institutions

13. The Ministers were of the view that existing international and regional agencies of the United Nations should play a major role in implementing Agenda 21. They expressed their support for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which should be strengthened.

14. In conclusion, the Ministers expressed the hope that UNCED would lead to a genuine meeting of minds and a true recognition of the needs of environment and development, without resulting in an additional burden on the developing countries, whose right to development must be fulfilled in the global partnership for the protection of our planet.